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Talking Points for ADDI

14 June 1986

JORDAN: King Hussein's PLO Strategy

King Hussein's closure of PLO offices in early July signals his determination to undermine Chairman Arafat's leadership of the PLO and intensifies the confrontation between the two leaders since Hussein broke off their dialogue in February. We believe the King faces a difficult, uphill battle in attempting to carry out his bold strategy.

*Hussein
Closed
at Arafat*

--Jordan's shutdown of Fatah offices and expulsion of leading Fatah personnel show that Hussein wants to separate his confrontation with PLO Chairman Arafat from his support of the PLO as the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" --a position formalized at the Rabat summit of 1974.

--The King may hope to reconfigure the PLO as it was in the 1960's, a strictly political organization subservient to its Arab patrons.

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Hussein's support for former chief of Fatah Military Intelligence Abu Zaim, leader of a fledgling anti-Arafat movement in Jordan, has been limited to providing safehaven for Abu Zaim and his supporters. Abu Zaim is gaining a higher profile in Amman, and the King may be considering publicly announcing his support for Abu Zaim's movement to encourage an alternative PLO leadership.

Abu Zaim

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Jordan-Syrian Cooperation

Hussein is convinced prospects for ousting Arafat depend largely on Syrian cooperation and thus will continue to court Damascus. The indefinite postponement of a meeting Jordan proposed between the Syrian and Iraqi Foreign Ministers apparently has not discouraged the King from following through on bilateral agreements he made with Damascus last year.

*Syrian
Coop.*

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[REDACTED]

--Our Embassy in Amman reports that King Hussein is now planning separate meetings Assad and Iraqi President Saddam Husayn after receiving Saudi King Fahd's pledge of support for his reconciliation effort during meetings in Riyadh last week. [REDACTED]

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Hussein's West Bank Strategy

The closing of PLO Offices in Amman will seriously complicate Hussein's efforts to undermine support for the PLO and encourage a pro-Jordanian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Jordan has outlined an ambitious and costly five-year development plan to improve the quality of life in the territories. Moreover, the King hopes to appoint new mayors for the West Bank acceptable to Israel before the scheduled rotation of the Israeli premiership in October.

--West Bank Palestinian public sentiment--as reflected in Palestinian newspaper commentaries--has rallied strongly behind the PLO since the closings and distrust of Jordanian intentions has grown.

--Despite Jordanian promises of protection, the PLO will increase its efforts to block the Jordanian efforts to appoint new mayors through the use of threats and intimidation. Most moderate West Bank leaders fear they will suffer the same fate as Nablus Mayor Zafir al-Masri, who was murdered by Palestinian radicals this year shortly after his appointment for allegedly cooperating with Israeli and Jordanian officials. [REDACTED]

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Impact on the PLO

King Hussein's crackdown on Arafat supporters almost certainly will strengthen Fatah hardliners who oppose close cooperation with Jordan.

--These hardliners undoubtedly will press for formal abrogation of the Jordan-PLO accord of 11 February and reconciliation with anti-Arafat groups based in Damascus.

--Fatah moderates, on the other hand, will continue to seek moderate Arab support from Saudi Arabia and Egypt in an attempt to block Jordan's strategy.

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[REDACTED]

--These moderates, although frustrated with Arafat's inability to make progress on the peace process, are unlikely soon to switch allegiances from Arafat to King Hussein. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

Despite serious challenges to his leadership since Israel forced the PLO out of Lebanon in 1982, Arafat retains considerable political prestige among rank-and-file commandos, Palestinians in the diaspora and the West Bank and Gaza.

--We have no evidence of significant Palestinian support for Abu Zaim, despite growing Jordanian support.

--A Fatah General Congress--the quasiparliamentary body which elects most of Fatah's leaders--would have to be convened to endorse a new PLO leader. Anti-Arafat forces so far have not gathered enough Palestinian support to hold a congress.

--Moreover, Hussein would have poor prospects for pre-cooking an Arab conclave that in effect would be asked to overturn the 1974 Rabat Summit recognizing the PLO--read Arafat personally--as the "sole, legitimate representative" of the Palestinians. [REDACTED]

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Although Assad and Hussein agree that Arafat must go, they would eventually disagree over a successor should Arafat eventually disappear from the scene.

--Damascus has been in no hurry to force the issue, probably in the hope that further decline in Jordanian-PLO relations will weaken both parties and strengthen Syria's voice in selecting new Palestinian leaders. [REDACTED]

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